

**Homeless Children in the School Nutrition Programs
Memorandum Sent to Homeless Liaisons**

Date: November 7, 2002

To: Homeless Liaison

From: Julia Thorius, Chief, Bureau of Food and Nutrition
Patti Harding, Lead Consultant, Bureau of Food and Nutrition
Ray Morley, State Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths

Subject: Homeless Children in the School Nutrition Programs

The Iowa Department of Education is in the process of implementing the changes mandated in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Title X of NCLB) which provides the definition of homeless children and youths for use in education. Another provision of the statute requires each school district to designate a local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youth. Many districts already have a designated liaison. Districts that have not designated a liaison please complete the enclosed form and return to Gretchen Kelly. It is recommended that liaisons be professional staff providing services within the public school/s. The information in this memorandum describes how the changes will impact the School Nutrition Programs at the local level. **Districts may need to review the approved reduced price meal applications and any denied meal applications on file to see if this new information will impact the level of benefits households are receiving.**

Definition of “Homeless”

As specified in the statute, the term “homeless”: means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The definition includes:

- (i) children and youths who are sharing the house of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- (ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- (iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus, or train station, or similar settings; and
- (iv) Migratory children who qualify as homeless because the children are living in circumstances described above.

Cooperation with local educational agency liaison

USDA is asking State agencies and school food authorities to be particularly sensitive to children and households who are identified by the local educational agency liaison as homeless. School food authorities should work with their local educational agency liaison for homeless youth and, where appropriate, Ray Morley, State Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths at 515-281-3966 to help ensure that these children, as well as other children who are defined as homeless by a director of a homeless shelter, have immediate access to the benefits of the child nutrition programs.

Documentation of free meal eligibility for homeless children

To expedite the delivery of nutritional benefits, school officials may accept documentation that the children are homeless from the local education liaison or director of a shelter or transitional housing project where the children reside. Documentation to substantiate free meal eligibility must consist of the child's name or a list of names, effective date(s), and the signature of the local educational liaison or the director of the shelter or transitional housing project. This documentation is acceptable in lieu of a free and reduced price meal application.

To implement these expedited procedures, school officials must work closely with the education liaison and director/s of homeless shelters and transitional housing projects to ensure that children are provided free meals benefits as promptly as possible, as well as to ensure that the school food service is promptly advised when children leave the school or are no longer considered homeless. In the latter case, school officials must provide the household with an application for free and reduced price meals.

Homeless children residing with another household

A child or family may temporarily reside with another household and still be considered homeless under the definition of homeless in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. In these cases the household size and income of the host family is not taken into consideration in determining the free meal eligibility for the child(ren) designated as homeless by the local educational agency liaison. Additionally, when a host family applies for free and reduced price meals for their own children, the host family may, if it chooses, include the homeless family as household members if the host family provides financial support to the homeless family, such as shelter, utilities, clothing or food. In such cases, the host family must also include any income received by the homeless family. School officials must determine eligibility for the host family in the traditional manner using total household members and income from all sources. However, free meal eligibility for the homeless child(ren) is based on the documentation provided by the local education liaison, even when the child is included on the host family's free and reduced price meal application. If the host family meets the free and reduced price meal eligibility criteria, school officials should provide the host family with temporary approval for free or reduced price meal benefits, as appropriate. The host family's eligibility should be re-evaluated when their household size decreases, i.e., the homeless family leaves.

Questions concerning meal benefits should be directed to Patti Harding at 515-281-4754 or patti.harding@ed.state.ia.us and questions concerning the homeless liaison should be directed to Ray Morley at 515-281-3966 or ray.morley@ed.state.ia.us.